

# **The Effects of a Gender Lens on the Political Socialization of Adolescent Girls**

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Despite recent gains in recognition and status, the number of women in the United States that hold elected office is vastly lower than the number of men that hold elected office. In the United States, 19.4% of seats in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress are filled by women; at a statewide level, women hold 23.7% of elected executive positions. The phenomenon of low female representation in elected office is inherently problematic: women's participation in government matters tremendously to the well-being of a nation. Women have a right to participate equally with men to have their perspective incorporated at levels of decision-making, particularly those levels that affect their own lives.

This study seeks to understand women's underrepresentation in political office by exploring one factor that contributes to the low tendency of women to run for office: the political socialization of adolescent girls. This particular factor is important to understand because we must consider that the process of socializing a woman to believe that she is deserving and capable of running for—and winning—elected office begins far before she is an adult. Research conducted by the Women's Fund of Central Ohio has suggested that a girl's self-confidence peaks at age 8; a girl whose self-esteem peaks before she even reaches middle school will have a difficult time growing up to be a woman that considers a run for public office. However, research that illuminates effective ways to instill political self-confidence in adolescent girls may be the first step in raising a generation of young women that rise to take their place in government. In the long-term, such research could help to change the way in which we educate children across the nation; by adopting a gender lens in the classroom, we will not only empower young women to realize their potential, but we will also normalize their political participation in the consciousness of young men.

### **Summary of Problem**

While women have made recent gains in political enfranchisement, including the first woman to run for president on the ticket of a major political party, women in the United States remain woefully underrepresented in political office at the federal, state, and municipal levels.

In the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, just 104 of 535 seats (19.4%) are filled by women, including 21 of 100 seats in the Senate (21.0%) and 83 of 435 seats in the House of Representatives (19.1%). In considering the intersectionality of race and gender, it is important to note that of the 104 women in Congress, 38 are women of color, plus 4 female delegates of color from Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands. Four of the 21 female members of the Senate are women of color. Of the 83 women in the House of Representatives, 34 are women of color ("Women in the U.S. Congress 2017").

At the state level, 75 women hold elective office (Figure 1) in 2017. This figure represents 23.7% of the 312 available statewide elective executive positions available statewide. Seven of the 74 women holding statewide executive office (9.5%) are women of color, including one of the first two women of color to serve as governor ("Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office 2017").

**Figure 1 – Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office in 2017**

Position	Number of women holding office		
	Democrat	Republican	Nonpartisan
Governor	2	3	
Lieutenant Governor	5	8	
Attorney General	4	3	
Secretary of State	7	6	
State Treasurer or Chief Financial Officer	4	4	
State Auditor	6	4	
Chief State Educational Official		7	1
Other	4	7	

Of the 7,383 available seats in state legislatures in the United States, 1,840 (24.9%) are occupied by women. Four hundred and forty-two of 1,972 (22.4%) state senate seats are filled by women; 1,398 of 5,411 (25.8%) members of state house seats are filled by women. Of the 441 female state senators, 107 are women of color. Of the 1,389 female state representatives, 326 are women of color (“Women in State Legislatures 2017”).

At the municipal level, 20 of the 100 (20.0%) largest cities in the United States had female mayors in 2017. Of the 20 female mayors, five are Black, one is Latina, and two are Asian-Pacific Islander. In 2017, 58 of the 284 US cities with population 100,000 and over had female mayors (“Women Mayors in U.S. Cities 2017”).

### **Research Question**

The poor representation of women in politics is problematic for a government that claims to be a representative democracy. A government that does not reflect the gender- and race-based diversity of the populace, let alone diversity based on sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or socioeconomic background, cannot adequately address the specific needs of that diverse populace.

While there are no formal barriers that discourage the participation of women in politics, such as campaign rules or laws disqualifying women from holding public office, it is important to understand the informal or tacit barriers preventing women from running for and holding political office. Why do women participate in politics (for the sake of this study, “participate in politics” is defined as “hold political office”) at a rate that is disproportionately lower than that of their male counterparts? If they do not participate in politics due to explicit barriers like rules or laws, what are the tacit barriers to their participation? Finally, how can we best address these tacit barriers and improve the likelihood that women will participate in politics?

### **Previous research on the political socialization of women**

Part of the explanation for the low political interest, efficacy, and knowledge of women rests on differences in resources and family situation: women are likely to earn less than men and shoulder more of the burden of household tasks than men, especially if children are involved. Yet even controlling for relevant resources does not fully eliminate the participation gender gap for political interest, efficacy, and knowledge (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997: 1060). The most important explanation for the low participation of women in politics is political socialization, the process by which adults and young people come to learn about their political environment and their place within it (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006: 234).

Part of the power of socialization stems from the low visibility of women in the field of politics. Politics has historically been an exclusively male field; Verba, et. al (1997) note that American democracy was nearly a century and a half old before women were admitted to full citizenship and before that, the exclusion of women was supported by centuries of ingrained custom. While women have made significant civil rights gains, the fact that the overwhelming majority of political figures, especially powerful ones, continue to be male serves to reinforce the idea that politics is still a male-dominated arena. The power of visibility is not to be underestimated; Atkeson asserts that the fact that women have low visibility in the political process, both as candidates and as political leaders, serves to shape women's interests and activity in politics. Specifically, she argues that the lack of women political leaders sends a cue to women citizens that they are more subjects than citizens, "fit to be led, but not to lead, and better ruled than rulers" (Atkeson 2003: 1043). The presence of female candidates and leaders implies that women can rule and are suitable for rule. In addition, the presence of female candidates and leaders indicates a degree of policy responsiveness, system openness, and legitimacy that may not be found when there are few female players (Atkeson 2003: 1043).

### **The politicization process of preadult women**

Beyond visibility, women are also conditioned to accept a more passive role in politics through socialization in the private sphere, including in the home. Research conducted prior to 1975 suggested that as all children gradually became more politically aware and motivated as they grew up, girls tended to lag consistently behind boys in political development. Thus, some argued that the lesser political involvement of women, versus men, in American society, was shaped by preadult socialization to a less active orientation (Owen and Dennis 1988: 24). The rise of feminism in the 1970s also promised to bolster the political consciousness of women through the stimulation of the feminist revolution and thus remove any gender differences learned by previous generations.

Owen and Dennis (1988) found that preadult socialization can still play a significant role in the transmission of gender-based variations in political cognitions, affect, and behavior (Jennings, 1984; Lovrich, Pierce, Tsurutani, & Abe, 1986; Rapoport, 1981; referenced in Owen and Dennis, 1988). Specifically, Owen and Dennis focused on four aspects of politicization that are important to the socialization process: cognitive,

affective, evaluational, and behavioral orientations. In their analysis, women scored consistently lower than men on measures of political cognition, which refers to an individual's understanding of government and politics. The most significant findings of sex differences for preadults were in the affective dimension, which refers to the way an individual feels about the political system. Girls, especially older girls, were less strongly oriented toward the political process and political leaders and scored lower on questions of political knowledge than did their male counterparts.

The tendency of girls to be less strongly oriented toward the political process and have less political knowledge than their male counterparts was also observed by Lawless and Fox (2013), who identified five factors that contribute to the gender gap in political ambition among young women who were college students at the time of their study:

1. Young men are more likely than young women to be socialized by their parents to think about politics as a career path.
2. From their school experiences to their peer associations to their media habits, young women tend to be exposed to less political information and discussion than do young men.
3. Young men are more likely than young women to have played organized sports and care about winning.
4. Young women are less likely than young men to receive encouragement to run for office—from anyone.
5. Young women are less likely than young men to think they will be qualified to run for office, even once they are established in their careers. (iii)

The first two factors identified by Lawless and Fox, focusing on the socialization of young women by their parents and social experiences (including school, peers, and media), are most relevant to this analysis. Through engaging in a low number of political discussions, as compared to their male counterparts, young girls are less likely to be socialized by their nurturing environments to understand politics to be a viable career path.

When the focus of the analysis is shifted to college-aged women, it is evident that the gender differences present among adolescent girls are not simply shed as girls age. By the time they enter college, gender norms have conditioned young women to be less likely than young men ever to have considered running for office, to express interest in a candidacy at some point in the future, or to consider elective office a desirable profession (Lawless and Fox, 2013: iii).

As evidence of the gender gap in political socialization is present by the time young women enter college, it is additionally useful to study the political socialization of girls prior to the time they enter college, namely during the period of adolescence. Because many experiences of politics are relevant to adolescents, including experiences of inclusion and exclusion, stereotypes and prejudice, membership in and identification with a group, rights and accountability, and others, politics are relevant to adolescents (Quintelier 2014: 52). Quintelier contends that five factors, including parents, peers, the school, voluntary associations, and the media, exert a strong influence on the political

socialization of adolescents at the initial level of socialization (Quintelier: 2014: 62). In particular, the strongest effects are found among peers, who through discussion and diversity are significantly influential and successful in creating greater political participation (Quintelier 2014: 65). In addition, there was a positive effect associated on the political socialization of adolescents when the media are used for news-gathering.

### **The socialization of girls in Central Ohio**

The production and reinforcement of gender norms also has a direct and measurable impact on the political socialization of adolescent girls. Gender norms, defined by the Women's Fund of Central Ohio to be the "scripts, expectations, and beliefs that most people have about what it means to 'act like' a man or a woman, the social roles, they are expected to fulfill, and how they are each supposed to look, feel and dress," constrain the development and aspirations of young girls ("The Pervasive Power of Gender Norms" 2016: 17). Rigid gender norms of traditional femininity mean mastering the ability to be deferential, desirable, and dependent. Girls who internalize these norms can mean valuing male appeal over career and academic success; girls who internalize traditional gender norms are more likely to drop out of school early and more likely to be involved in teen and unplanned pregnancies ("The Pervasive Power of Gender Norms" 2016: 23).

Rigid feminine gender norms push girls away from certain careers. According to data gathered through use of the Harvard Implicit Association test, central Ohio women strongly implicitly and explicitly associate women with family and men with career, even more so than do Ohio men ("The Pervasive Power of Gender Norms" 2016: 27). Because of these associations, many young girls may not be considered by their mothers or female teachers, let alone fathers or male teachers, when certain opportunities arise that could help them obtain skills they might need to be successful in fields that are traditionally considered to be male-dominated. The Women's Fund names STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields as an example of these stereotypically "male" fields, but the field of politics is also relevant to this discussion. Many local experts cited in the report reported that girls and women need to "prove themselves" before being viewed as leaders, while leadership is often assumed to be second nature for boys and men ("The Pervasive Power of Gender Norms" 2016: 8).

### **The case for a gender lens in discussion**

By including a gender lens, which refers to a specific focus on the ways in which gender influences opportunity for women and girls, in discussions, parents and educators can help destabilize their own implicit and explicit biases as well as challenge gender norms as they are formed. It is important to recognize that, as in the case of women holding political office, gender influences not only the opportunities that women and girls are offered, but also the tendency of women and girls to take advantage of these opportunities and turn them into achievement, like running for and holding political office.

In particular, engaging young girls in discussion about female political figures can help to challenge the idea that politics is a man's field. Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) discuss the effect of visible female political figures, finding that a greater number of visible female political figures is associated with a greater number of adolescent girls that report an expectation of being involved in politics, a phenomenon termed the "role model effect" (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006: 244). While Campbell and Wolbrecht fail to find evidence that the role model effect operates through changed conceptions of the appropriateness of politics for women, their findings indicate that the presence of female political figures leads to greater propensity for political discussion within the home of adolescent girls. These conversations, sparked by the presence of female politicians, change the degree to which politics is a topic for debate and conversation as girls are socialized into their roles as democratic citizens (245).

### **Hypotheses**

Previous literature suggests that a factor with a strong influence on the low number of women who hold political office is the socialization of adolescent girls. Women tend not to hold political office because they tend not to consider themselves capable of holding political office or even running for it; women tend not to consider themselves capable of holding political office because they are not socialized as young women or girls to consider themselves capable of doing so. This literature suggests that if we change the way we socialize young women and girls, we will change the number of women who hold political office.

This study seeks to address the research questions outlined above with the following hypotheses:

1. Engaging adolescent girls in discussion about politics will have a positive effect on their assessment of their capability of holding a job in local, state, national, or international politics.
2. Engaging adolescent girls in discussions about politics that focuses on the involvement of women in politics will have an increased likelihood that they will consider themselves capable of holding a job in local, state, national, or international politics.

### **Empirical Strategy**

In order to test these hypotheses, I developed a study in which I would measure the effect of guided political discussion on the political self-esteem of adolescent girls. This study would compare the responses of a control group and an experimental group before and after a series of discussions focusing on national and international news items. The responses of the control group would serve as a benchmark for the effect of political discussion on the political self-esteem of adolescent girls. The experimental group would receive the treatment of engaging in discussion with a focus on the involvement of women; the responses of the experimental group would test the strength of the role model effect discussed by Campbell and Wolbrecht (2003), which suggests that the focus on female political actors has a significant effect on the tendency of adolescent girls to consider themselves viable future political actors.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were all sixth-grade students at a suburban middle school in central Ohio. Approval to use human subjects in research was obtained from the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board on September 30, 2016 under study 2016B0228.

The research site was selected on the basis of convenience, including proximity to the researcher's home university. The experimental site is one of four middle schools in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio, though the sixth-grade students in the study are not considered middle schoolers as they were moved to the site from an elementary school for reasons of facility space.

Prior to the initiation of this study, 60 sixth grade students were randomly sorted by school administration into one of three social studies classes. I approached the administration of the school in April 2016 and received permission to enter the school and use the students as subjects in my research. In September 2016, I selected two of the three social classes on a basis of convenience and invited every student in the two classes to participate in the research study. I explained the study, including goals, format, and requirements to participate, and acknowledged that there would be neither penalty nor incentive for participating. All students received a parental permission form and an assent to participate form. Only those students who returned both forms participated in the research study. In total, 9 students from one class and 9 students from the other class participated in the study. I randomly selected one class to serve as the control group and the other class to serve as the experimental group.

Data was collected from participants through the use of pre-test and post-test surveys. The completion rate was 100%.

## **Measures**

After parental consent and child assent were obtained for each study participant, each participant completed a pre-test survey. The surveys were coded with numbers that were randomly generated and assigned to each student. Students were instructed to use the number that was assigned to them in place of their names. The key to the de-identified data was retained by the research team and destroyed before the data was analyzed.

The survey combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies by using open-ended questions and closed-ended (multiple-choice) questions.

The open-ended ended questions were used to gather qualitative data about the participants' perceptions of their abilities and capacity to engage in future political leadership activity. Participants were encouraged to use as much detail as possible to answer the following questions:

1. What about yourself do you think would help you in a job in which you could influence politics on a local or state level?



2. What would you change about yourself now so that you could be the kind of person who can influence politics on a local or state level?
3. What about yourself do you think would help you in a job in which you could influence politics on a national or international level?
4. What would you change about yourself now so that you could be the kind of person who can influence politics on a national or international level?

The closed-ended questions were used to test difference in outcomes for the two groups:

1. How well do you feel like you understand news events relating to international or domestic (national) politics?
  1. Not at all
  2. Somewhat
  3. Extremely well
2. In comparison to men, how much of an impact do you feel like women can have to influence these kinds of political situations and current events?
  1. No impact
  2. Some impact
  3. A large impact
3. Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence local politics?
  1. Not qualified
  2. Somewhat qualified
  3. Very qualified
4. Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence state politics?
  1. Not qualified
  2. Somewhat qualified
  3. Very qualified
5. Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence national politics?
  1. Not qualified
  2. Somewhat qualified
  3. Very qualified
6. Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence international politics?
  1. Not qualified
  2. Somewhat qualified
  3. Very qualified

## Procedures

Before each of six seminar sessions, participants read a news article about the day's topic of discussion. The daily topics of discussion were broad topic headings relating to current national and world events as follows:

Session Number	Discussion Topic
1	Development in Africa
2	Space exploration
3	Conflict in the Middle East
4	Social movements in the United States
5	Islamophobia in Europe
6	The 2016 US Election

Both the experimental and control groups read articles about the same discussion topic classification, but the articles read by the experimental group were specifically chosen to have a gender lens. That is, the articles read by the experimental group focused on the involvement of women in the issue at hand, including the specific impact of the given issue on women or the leadership of women in the given situation.

Session Number	Discussion Topic	Control Group Article	Experimental Group Article
1	Islamophobia in Europe	"Demand for more mosques in France raises tension." <sup>1</sup>	"French MPs vote to ban Islamic full veil in public." <sup>2</sup>
2	Space exploration	"Ecuador's lone astronaut leads unlikely space race among smaller countries." <sup>3</sup>	"The evolving media reaction to female astronauts." <sup>4</sup>
3	Conflict in the Middle East	"In Syrian war, a bigger role for Russian strategists." <sup>5</sup>	"Women must be at the peace table for a chance of ending war in Syria." <sup>6</sup>
4	Social movements in the United States	"NYPD sent undercover officers to Black Lives Matter	"Serena Williams writes about Black

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<sup>1</sup> Chazan, David. "Demand for more mosques in France raises tension." *The Telegraph*, 6 Apr. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "French MPs vote to ban Islamic full veil in public." BBC News, 13 Jul. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Rueda, Manuel. "Ecuador's lone astronaut leads unlikely space race among smaller countries." *Fusion*, 24 Feb. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Bobst, Kristen. "The evolving media reaction to female astronauts." *Mother Nature Network*, 15 Feb. 2016.

<sup>5</sup> "In Syrian war, a bigger role for Russian strategists." *Reuters*, 15 Feb. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Hodgson, Fiona. "Women must be at the peace table for a chance of ending war in Syria." *The Guardian*, 20 Jan. 2016.

		protest, records reveal.” <sup>7</sup>	Lives Matter on Facebook.” <sup>8</sup>
5	Development in Africa	“Here’s How Mobile Innovation Can Help End Poverty.” <sup>9</sup>	“Participation of women and girls crucial for Africa’s development.” <sup>10</sup>
6	The 2016 US Election	“Third-Party Voters Know What They Want.” <sup>11</sup>	“This Election Isn’t About Politics. It’s About How America Sees Women.” <sup>12</sup>

I met with each group twice a week for three week, meeting with each group a total of six times on the same six days. During the 40-minute discussion period, I guided the group through each article using the following discussion questions:

1. Do you have any questions about the content of this article?
2. What does the writer want you to believe? What reasons or evidence does he give? Is it credible evidence?
3. Describe the purpose and tone. Does the author use any loaded words?
4. What is the author’s worldview? What assumptions does he have that he wants to communicate?
5. What were your beliefs about this subject before you read this article? What are your beliefs now? What doubts or questions do you still have? What insights did this article give you?

After the sixth discussion session concluded, I distributed post surveys to each participant. Each participant was instructed to complete the survey at home and on their own, using as much time as they needed. Participants returned the survey to their classroom teacher two days after the study concluded.

## Data

I began by measuring the level of political socialization of the participants prior to the beginning of the program. The instrument I developed used six multiple choice questions and four short answer questions to provide insight into the present state of mind of the participants by asking them about the activities in which they expected to participate and jobs they expected to be able to hold in the future. These questions do

<sup>7</sup> Joseph, George. “NYPD sent undercover officers to Black Lives Matter protest, records reveal.” *The Guardian*, 29 Sept. 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Linton, Caroline. “Serena Williams writes about Black Lives Matter on Facebook.” CBS News, 27 Sept. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, Phillip. “Here’s How Mobile Innovation Can Help End Poverty.” *Huffington Post*, 25 Feb. 2016.

<sup>10</sup> “Participation of women and girls crucial for Africa’s development.” African Development Bank Group, 11 Feb. 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Roller, Emma. “Third-Party Voters Know What They Want.” *The New York Times*, 4 Oct. 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Pearson, Catherine. “This Election Isn’t About Politics. It’s About How America Sees Women.” *Huffington Post*, 9 Oct. 2016.

not provide windows into the future but rather illuminate the present attitudes and conceptions of the adolescent participants into the future.

### **Pre-program survey**

Eighteen participants completed the pre-program survey. Their responses to the pre-program survey's six multiple choice questions are represented in Figure 3. The nine participants in the control class are represented by a participant number ending in 1. The nine participants in the control class are represented by a participant number ending in 2.

**Figure 3 – Pre-Program Survey Results**

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Q5</b>	<b>Q6</b>
<b>21</b>	2	3	1	1	1	1
<b>31</b>	2	2	1	1	1	1
<b>41</b>	3	3	3	2	1	1
<b>51</b>	3	3	3	2	2	1
<b>61</b>	2	3	3	3	1	1
<b>71</b>	2	3	2	2	2	2
<b>91</b>	2	2	2	1	1	1
<b>101</b>	2	3	2	2	2	3
<b>111</b>	2	3	3	2	1	1
<b>12</b>	2	3	2	2	2	1
<b>22</b>	2	2	2	2	1	1
<b>32</b>	2	3	2	2	2	1
<b>42</b>	2	2	2	1	1	1
<b>52</b>	2	3	2	2	1	1
<b>62</b>	3	2	3	2	2	2
<b>72</b>	2	3	1	1	1	1
<b>82</b>	2	2	2	2	1	1
<b>92</b>	2	3	2	2	1	1

At the outset, the classes, evaluated as collectives, are relatively equal in their responses to the questions. The average responses for each class, separated by question, are shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4 – Average Responses by Class**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
<b>Class 1 (Control)</b>	2.22222 2	2.77777 8	2.22222 2	1.77777 8	1.33333 3	1.33333 3
<b>Class 2 (Experimental)</b>	2.11111 1	2.55555 6	2	1.77777 8	1.33333 3	1.11111 1

The difference in mean responses for each classes was not significant for any question at a 90% confidence level.

The average response from both classes to the first question, “How well do you feel like you understand news events relating to international or domestic (national) politics?” was roughly equal, corresponding to a response indicating that the participants in both classes felt they understood news events relating to international or domestic (national) politics “somewhat” well. Class 1 scored slightly higher than Class 2 in the average response to the second question, “In comparison to men, how much of an impact do you feel like women can have to influence these kinds of political situations and current events?” The average response of Class 1 indicates an evaluation of women’s impact closer to option 3, “A large impact” in comparison to the response of Class 2, which fell closer to option 2, “Some impact.” This disparity suggests that at the outset, Class 1 had a more favorable assessment of the efficacy of women, compared to their male counterparts, to influence political events than did Class 2.

Class 1 also scored higher than Class 2 on two of four questions assessing future capacity to hold a job that influences politics. Class 1’s average response to Question 3, “Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence local politics?” was between option 2, “Somewhat qualified” and option 3, “Very qualified.” The average response of Class 2 corresponded to a value of 2, which indicated that on average, respondents in Class 2 felt they would be “Somewhat qualified” to hold a job in which they could influence local politics. Class 1’s average response to Question 6, “Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence international politics?” fell between option 1, “Not qualified” and option 2, “Somewhat qualified.” In comparison to this response, Class 2’s average response to Question 6 was 1.1111, also falling between option 1 and 2 but at a lower value than Class 1, suggesting that respondents in Class 2 had a negative evaluation of their future ability to hold a job in which they could influence local or international politics in comparison to the self-evaluation of respondents in Class 1.

Class 1 and Class 2 scored equally on their average responses to Question 4, “Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence state politics?” and Question 5, “Based on what you know about yourself now, how qualified do you feel that you would be in the future to have a job in which you could influence national politics?” The average response of both Class 1 and Class 2 to Question 4 was 1.7778, indicating an

average response greater than option 1, “Not qualified” and closer to option 2, “Somewhat qualified.” The average response of both Class 1 and Class 2 to Question 5 was 1.3333, indicating an average response below option 2, “Somewhat qualified” and closer to option 1, “Not qualified.”

At the outset, the disparity between the average responses to Question 3 – Question 6 indicate a disparity in the self-evaluation of respondents in all classes of their future ability to participate in politics at the local, state, national, and international level. The average response in both classes declines from Question 3 to Question 6, suggesting that respondents judged their future selves to be increasingly less capable of holding a job in which they could influence political events at the local, state, national, and international level.

### Post-program survey

The same eighteen participants completed the post-program survey. Their responses are displayed in Figure 5, where a 0 in the Treatment column indicates that the participant was in the control class and a 1 in the Treatment column indicates that the participant was in the experimental class.

**Figure 5 – Post-Program Survey Results**

Participant Number	Treatment	Q1.1	Q2.1	Q3.1	Q4.1	Q5.1	Q6.1
21	0	2	3	1	1	1	1
31	0	3	2	1	1	1	1
41	0	2	3	2	1	1	1
51	0	3	3	3	3	2	1
61	0	2	2	2	2	1	1
71	0	2	3	2	2	1	1
91	0	2	2	2	2	1	1
101	0	3	3	2	2	3	2
111	0	2	3	2	2	1	1
12	1	3	3	2	2	2	2
22	1	3	3	3	3	2	2
32	1	2	3	3	3	2	2
42	1	3	2	2	2	2	2
52	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
62	1	2	2	2	3	3	3
72	1	2	2	2	1	1	1
82	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
92	1	3	3	2	2	2	2

The relative parity between classes observed by the average responses of each class to the pre-program survey is not present in the post-program survey results. The average response to each question, separated by class, is shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6 – Average Responses by Class**

	<b>Q1.1</b>	<b>Q2.1</b>	<b>Q3.1</b>	<b>Q4.1</b>	<b>Q5.1</b>	<b>Q6.1</b>
<b>Class 1 (Control)</b>	2.333333	2.66666 7	1.88888 9	1.77777 8	1.33333 3	1.11111 1
<b>Class 2 (Experimental)</b>	2.333333	2.33333 3	2.11111 1	2.11111 1	1.88888 9	1.88888 9

When I conducted a two-tailed t-test, I found that the difference in means between classes was significant at a 90% confidence level for Question 5 and Question 6, suggesting that participants in Class 2 were significantly more likely than their counterparts in Class 1 to consider themselves capable of holding a job in the future that could influence national or international politics as a result of the treatment.

The change in intra-class means between pre-program and post-program surveys also offers useful, albeit limited, insights. The change in mean responses to each question, by class, is shown in Figure 7.

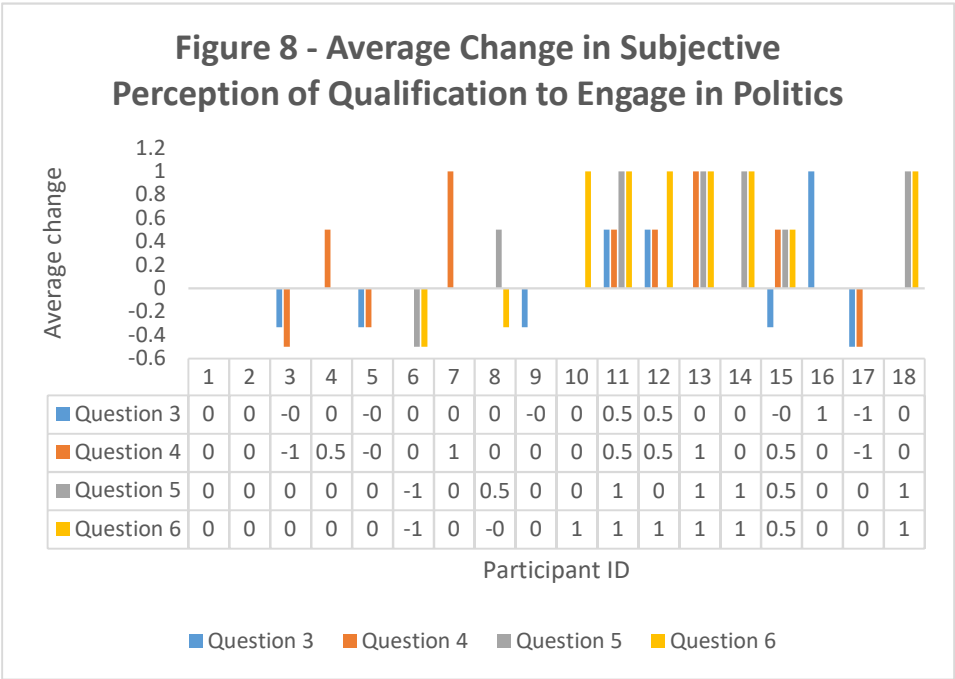
**Figure 7 – Changes in Mean Responses by Class**

	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Q5</b>	<b>Q6</b>
<b>Class 1 (Control)</b>	0.111111 11	- 0.1111 1	- 0.33333	0	0	- 0.22222
<b>Class 2 (Experimental)</b>	0.222222 22	- 0.2222 2	0.11111 1	0.33333 3	0.55555 6	0.77777 8

The change in means between pre-program and post-program responses was not significant at a 95% confidence level for any of the responses from the control group. For the experimental group, the change in means between pre-program and post-program surveys was significant at a 95% confidence level for two of six questions for the control group; the post-program responses to Question 5 and Question 6 were significantly higher than the pre-program responses, suggesting that participants in the experimental group were significantly more likely to consider themselves capable of holding a job in the future that could influence national or international politics as a result of the treatment.

Though the change in responses was not significant for every question, individuals in the experimental group experienced much more positive variability in their responses than did participants in the control group. The change in responses per individual, which

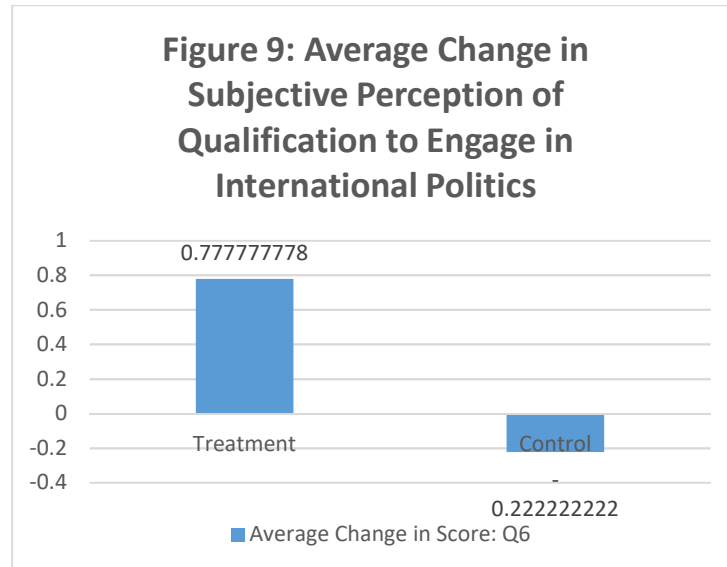
is to say the value of the difference of the post-test response and the pre-test response, standardized over the pre-test response, is shown by Figure 8.



As shown by Figure 8, the modal change in responses all questions by respondents in the control group was 0, with several respondents in the control group experiencing negative change between pre-test and post-test responses. In contrast, most participants in the experimental group had positive change in their responses, in particular to Question 5 and Question 6.

The most significant change between pre-test and post-test responses and the most significant difference between groups was observed in the responses to Question 6, which asked participants to evaluate their future capability of holding a job that could influence international politics. Figure 9 shows the average change between pre-test and post-test responses for Question 6 in the control and experimental groups.





## Results

*Hypothesis 1: Engaging adolescent girls in discussion about politics will encourage them to consider themselves capable to hold a job in local, state, national, or international politics.*

I evaluated the first hypothesis by considering the effects of the program on the responses to Question 3 - Question 6. These questions asked the participants to evaluate their future capability to hold a job in which they could influence local, state, national, or international politics based on their current assessment of their capabilities.

The change in response to these questions was positive and large for participants in the study, suggesting that the political discussions had a positive effect on the likelihood that participants would rate themselves as more likely to hold a job in which they could influence any level of politics. The change in average responses from all participants were positive for all questions apart from Question 3, indicating a positive change in the self-assessment of participants of future qualification to hold a job that would influence state, national, or international politics. Although this is a small study, these results are encouraging, suggesting that the political discussion encouraged participants in the study to consider themselves more capable of holding a job that in local, state, national, or international politics.

These results are consistent with the hypothesis that political discussion encourages empowerment.

*Hypothesis 2: Engaging adolescent girls in discussions about politics that focuses on the involvement of women in politics will have an increased likelihood that they will consider themselves capable of holding a job in local, state, national, or international politics.*

I evaluated the second hypothesis by comparing the effects of the program on the experimental group to the effects of the program on the control group. I measured these effects by considering the responses to Question 3 – Question 6.

Results indicating that the magnitude of the change in results for the experimental class was greater than the magnitude of change in results for the control group would be consistent with this hypothesis. Indeed, the evaluation of pre-test mean responses and post-test mean responses within the experimental group suggested that, as a result of the treatment, participants in the experimental group were significantly more likely to consider themselves capable of holding a job in the future that could influence national or international politics. Evaluation of post-test means between classes suggested that participants in the experimental group were also significantly more likely than their counterparts in the control group to consider themselves capable of holding a job in the future that could influence national or international politics as a result of the treatment.

These results are consistent with the hypothesis that political discussion with a gender lens has an increased effect on the positive political socialization of adolescent girls.

## **Discussion**

While the population means and the average responses for individuals in the experimental group suggest that political discussion was associated with belief of higher future qualification for a career in politics, the individual means for the control group do not support this conclusion. In fact, the average response to Question 3 and Question 6 declined between pre-test and post-test and the average response to Question 4 and Question 5 did not change. The modal value for average individual change per question in the control class was zero, suggesting that it was most common for individuals in the control class to experience no effect on assessment of future qualification for a career in politics as a result of the study.

While this observation does not confirm the hypothesis that political discussion is associated with higher level of self-assessed future political efficacy, one possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the negative effect of the absence of visible female political figures is so strong that it serves to deter young girls. Rather than empowering them by giving them a sense of knowledge and familiarity with political events and vocabulary, political discussion without visible female political role models reinforces the idea that women are ill-suited for politics.

It is additionally useful to examine the magnitude of the positive changes in responses to questions about future qualification to hold a job in politics, specifically in the responses of the experimental group, whose responses demonstrated the greatest impact of the study. While there was positive change in the average response for each question, the most significant change was for responses to Question 5, which asked participants to evaluate their future qualification to hold a job that would influence national politics, and Question 6, which asked participants to evaluate their future qualification to hold a job that would influence international politics. The average response of participants in the experimental group to Question 5 increased over 40%

after the study, while the average response of participants in the experimental group to Question 6 increased by a factor of 70% after the study; these changes were significant at a 90% confidence level. The class-level changes to responses to Question 5 and Question 6 for the experimental group was larger than the average response to Question 3, which asked about future qualification to hold a job that influences local politics, and Question 4, which asked about future qualification to hold a job that influences state politics. The changes in the average response to these questions were 5% and 18%, respectively; these changes were not significant at a 90% confidence level.

This observation suggests that participants in the experimental group were significantly more likely to consider themselves likely to be qualified in the future to hold a job that influences national or international politics than they were to consider themselves qualified in the future to hold a job that influences local or state politics. This disparity could indicate that adolescent girls understand the qualifications needed to be involved in local and state politics to be different from the qualifications needed to be involved in national and international politics. While participants were likely to believe that they would have the qualifications needed to hold a job in national or international politics, they were not likely to believe they would have the qualifications needed to hold a job in local or state politics. This result could be explained by the unfamiliarity that most adolescents have with local or state politics. While the barrier to entry for local and state politics is lower than the barrier of entry to national and international politics, national and international political events, including changes of power, receive much more attention in the media than do events on the local or state scale. As a result, adolescents are more likely to have developed an opinion on the qualifications needed to hold a job in national or international politics.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to address the underrepresentation of women in political office by exploring the political socialization of adolescent girls. Previous literature suggests that the political socialization process for adolescent girls produces young women that have less favorable assessments of their capabilities than their male counterparts; as a result of engaging sixth-grade girls in political discussion, I expected to see an increase in assessments of future capability to engage in politics at the local, state, national, and/or international level. Through adding a gender lens to this discussion for one group of participants, I expected to see an even greater increase in assessments of future capability to hold a job in local, state, national, and/or international politics. Ultimately, I found that political discussion had a positive effect on the subjective assessment of capacity to engage in politics in the future. For participants that received the treatment of the gender lens in political discussion, the magnitude of this boost on political self-esteem was larger than those who did not receive the treatment.

These conclusions are encouraging for parents and educators and for anyone who has an interest in the increase in women's political representation. By engaging girls in political discussion, especially in political discussion with a gender lens, we help to

nurture girls who will grow up understanding that they are capable of holding careers in politics.

While the results of this study supported the original hypotheses, this study is not without limitations. First, this study only asked participants to evaluate their future capability to hold a job in politics. This level of engagement is important for women, but is certainly not the only way for individuals to engage in political life. Future research should explore the other avenues through which individuals can influence political events, including grassroots organizing, volunteering, and even radical activism. Second, this study did not measure the tendency of participants to engage in political discussion in the home. Studies suggest that the frequency of political discussion in the home has a strong effect on the positive political socialization of adolescent girls. Finally, this study did not measure any demographic data. While young children spend much of their time in school and are prone to influence from socializing elements within the academic environment, many factors outside of the school influence the way that children view themselves and their future capabilities. These factors may include socioeconomic background and family structure. In addition, this study only captured results from eighteen students from one school in a suburban school district. In order to be able to generalize these conclusions to the larger population of sixth-grade girls or even middle-school girls, future study should gather data from other grades and other schools, particularly those with different demographic representation.

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